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Secretary Miller "Connects" with Quality Central Staff

**Budget, personnel issues among topics
covered at CFC Connections meeting**

By Lisa Wallace, CFC Communications

CFC Secretary Viola Miller brought her quarterly "Let's Talk" regional staff visits home to Frankfort Wednesday, May 8, to engage in give-and-take on issues of interest to Quality Central staff.

Miller began the "Let's Talk" sessions in 2001 to open lines of communication with CFC staff statewide. Wednesday's meeting was the first for Quality Central staff, and more than 150 attended.



QC employees listen attentively to Sec. Miller's "hot topics."

Miller said she mingles with field staff more often than with staff in Frankfort

but is well aware of the quality of work done by Quality Central.

"Just based on the work you do, the outcomes for our kids and families and your professionalism, I can't imagine there's a better central office staff in the nation – maybe in the world," she said.

State Government Budget

Miller said anyone who reads newspaper coverage of the state's budgetary impasse "knows as much as I do" about it. The General Assembly recently adjourned its regular session and a subsequent special session without passing a new biennial budget, and until a budget is passed, state agencies can spend only for essential services.

Budget officials "would have a hard time defining anything we do as NOT being essential," so no cuts in current programs are anticipated, Miller said.

She said CFC "puts its money where its mouth is" by holding down administrative costs. The Cabinet spends only 7-8 percent of its budget for administration and operating costs, with the balance, about 92 percent, going to services and personnel, she said.

Miller said the Cabinet has suffered no severe or unexpected cuts but, because of the lack of a state operating budget, it does face uncertainties, such as whether or how contracts can be renewed or issued, raises given or new programs implemented. She pledged to keep staff informed of any budget news.

"For now, don't panic and just continue the great work you do," she said. "I'll let you know when it's time to panic."

She said a significant increase in federal funding should minimize the impact of an anticipated cut of about \$16 million in state funding. The federal funding increase, she said, is due to staff diligence in complying with federal directives and program standards.

Miller hopes an economic upturn will ease the state's budget woes and spending restrictions. She thanked staff for their cooperation with overtime and travel limits imposed as part of statewide belt-tightening.

Comprehensive Family Services

Comprehensive Family Services has created a cultural change in the cabinet's approach to service delivery to families and children. Where the cabinet's focus had been on programs, its focus is now on families and on building community partnerships to improve services to help families. "Comprehensive Family Services, as we practice it at CFC, is a strength-based philosophy," Miller said. "We find the strengths in our families and in their communities and then match community strengths to family needs . . ."

The "Everyone a Leader" employee skills development program is an important part of Comprehensive Family Services. EAL is intended to help staff work together more effectively and improve customer service.

"EAL is in place across the state and it's having a big pay-off," Miller said. "We need to constantly reinforce those skill sets and integrate training into all aspects of all jobs we do at CFC to keep producing more and bigger payoffs."

Program Accreditation

Accreditation of protection and permanency programs is complete in 13 CFC regions and should be finished by fall in the remaining three regions.

"We chose to seek accreditation because, although it involves a lot of hard work, it's worth it to us to meet national standards of excellence and distinguish ourselves in that way," Miller said.

She said the cabinet will continue to work toward full accreditation for all its child welfare and family support programs.

Federal TANF Reauthorization

The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), administered in this state as the Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (K-TAP), is CFC's single largest source of federal funding at around \$188 million per year, combined with an 80 percent state match.

Miller said it appears the TANF block grant to the states will remain at current funding levels, although nothing will be certain until program funding is reauthorized by Congress. Legislation now making the rounds in Washington known as the tri-partisan bill proposes no significant reduction in state funding and, she said, includes provisions that are friendlier to Kentucky families than previous proposals.

Earlier bill versions proposed raising work requirements for benefits recipients with no increase in funding for child care. Miller said that would place insurmountable hardships on many K-TAP families.

The tri-partisan bill retains the current 30-hour per week work requirement for benefits and proposes an increase in child care funding. Miller said it isn't likely that both provisions would pass, but either would be an improvement over previous plans.

The tri-partisan bill would also continue caseload reduction credits, which have helped ensure federal funding for important services and expedite resolution of outstanding cases.

Customer Service Feedback

Miller said the cabinet still receives complaints from customers who are passed to multiple offices before getting the service they need.

She encouraged staff to work harder to honor the 'one call rule' by getting full information on the caller's concern and making sure the information - and not the caller - is routed to the appropriate office or individual.

At the same time, she added, the cabinet also gets more calls of a positive nature, many of them from CFC field staff who commend Quality Central for efforts to provide prompt, effective service.

"Remember and apply your EAL principles each and every day," Miller said. "Treating each other and our customers with dignity and courtesy takes no more time than treating them snarly."



CFC Secretary Viola Miller focuses entirely on what's important to her CFC staff during the meeting.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Miller called the Cabinet's CQI program a vital link in a problem-solving process that has proven to work well.

CQI establishes tiers of review of problems that impede service delivery or job performance. Staff first try to find their own solutions, and if that doesn't work, issues are referred up the tier structure until they are either resolved or determined to be insoluble.

Miller said the only issue that reached the top tier and could not be resolved had to do with pay for caseworkers while on call. She said any satisfactory

solution would have violated federal labor law.

“When staff are empowered and provided the tools and resources to resolve conflicts and solve problems on their own, we’ve found morale increases, cooperation and respect among co-workers increases and job performance is enhanced,” Miller said. She said she will instruct core leadership to make sure all members of their staffs engage in the process.



Sec. Miller enlists Teresa Suter, Executive Director of the Office of Human Resource Management, to answer personnel questions.

Q & A

Most questions raised at the meeting concerned personnel issues.

Miller told one questioner that cabinet retirees may be allowed to return to work on a part-time or other flexible basis, depending on existing needs and the costs and benefits involved. She added that, given the volume of retirements from the cabinet, allowing retired employees to return to work can be a cost-effective way to ensure continuity of services and maintain high levels of expertise and institutional memory.

On other topics, Miller said:

- The latest reports indicate state workers will receive wage and salary increments of 2.7 percent in each year of the biennium rather

than the usual 5 percent. The state’s employee retirement match is expected to be reduced, as well, but nothing is certain until a budget is in place.

- Staff concerned about the rise in health insurance costs might consider telling legislators and the Personnel Cabinet they’d accept less choice in their health plans and consolidation of state employees into a single health care pool in exchange for reduced out-of-pocket costs.
- She doesn’t expect limits on overtime and travel to ease soon.
- She expects the role of Child Support field staff will shift away from casework and toward program quality, training and other managerial tasks.

Miller said she plans to revive Vision 2000, which was launched in 1997 to improve access to and effectiveness of agency services. The program gave Cabinet field staff and partners in their communities more authority and flexibility to address local needs.

“Vision 2000 was so successful and continues to provide such tremendous payoffs for kids and families, I believe it’s important to keep that success going and growing,” Miller said. “I don’t know right now how we’ll do it, but we will work our hardest to find the funding to continue and expand Vision 2000. It’s too important to morale, networking and outcomes for the kids and families of Kentucky not to.”

A special group called Quality Central Connections meets semi-monthly to discuss issues of interest and concern to Frankfort staff and to plan special employee events. The Secretary encouraged anyone at Quality Central interested in being part of this group to attend the next meeting Monday, June 10 at 9:30 a.m. in the CFC Cafeteria. Meetings are held every second and fourth Monday of the month.

Handling Open Records Requests: Let Us Help!

By Mike Jennings, CFC Communications

The cabinet’s communications office is well equipped to handle requests for documents under the Kentucky Open Records Statute. In fact, we consider that one of our main responsibilities.

If you need help with an open records request, you can count on us.

Some of you are comfortable handling certain sorts of records requests—and that’s fine. The Protection and Permanency staff, for example, has its own system for answering requests from individuals for records pertaining to their own cases.

We don’t want to interfere with any arrangement for handling records requests that’s already working well. But when a request filed under the Open Records Statute poses an immediate or potential problem, we’d be glad to help.

Perhaps the description of the records sought is so broad or vague it leaves you scratching your head. Perhaps locating and copying the records quickly would interfere with other important work. Perhaps the requesting party clearly intends to publish the records or use them for political ends.

If you have any such concern about a request, we’ll work closely with you and the Office of the General Counsel in deciding how to respond.

By bringing us your records requests, often you’ll be helping us at least as much as we’re likely to help you.

That’s because a records request is likely to be the just the first step in information-gathering, especially if the request comes from a news organization or a political campaign.

When the follow-up questions come, the communications office will probably have to deal with them. We’re in a better position to do that effectively if we’ve been the loop from the first.

Online Resource Guide Needs Staff Support to Succeed

By Anya Armes Weber

Like any other 2-year-old, KyCARES.net has faced several changes, even growing pains, in its young life.

And with the help of Cabinet staff, it will become healthier this year, said Larry Doyle, the Web site's manager of provider data.

Supported by the Governor's Office of Technology, KyCARES is an online guide to community services. It lists more than 26,000 local, state and federal providers that offer more than 43,000 services under categories that include basic needs, health care, income security, individual and family life, mental health care and counseling and organizational/community services.

Doyle has been on board since the site's inception in March 1997. He called it a groundbreaking example of collaboration among state agencies.

Including the Cabinet for Families and Children, six agencies share the costs of running KyCARES. The project began as a partnership among the Families and Children, Health Services and Workforce Development cabinets. Last year they were joined by the Transportation and Justice cabinets and the Department for Education.

Each agency pays about \$62,500 of KyCARES' annual \$375,000 budget. CFC Secretary Viola Miller said that's money well spent, especially if Cabinet staff, and most importantly our customers, benefit from the service.

"KyCARES is an invaluable tool in the era of Comprehensive Family Services," she said. "It's the only statewide resource directory that details services of the Cabinet and community providers as well."

But for the site to be successful, it has to be as extensive and accurate as possible,

Doyle said. So he's calling on all Cabinet staff to update agency information on the site, use the Web site and encourage providers to do the same.

Doyle called the Web site a "win-win" situation for everyone.

For customers, it's a 24-hour referral service.

Searching for providers is easy, Doyle said. "There are multiple paths so people with very little computer experience can search," he said. New visitors can search by simply checking boxes next to the services they're looking for in their county or within a set number of miles. Advanced users can search by keyword or browse categories.

Secretary asks staff to log on

Secretary Viola Miller challenges every staff in CFC to log on and see what this outstanding service can do for you and the families you serve. Log onto the one-stop resource guide at kycares.net. For KyCARES support, call (888) 567-1373.

A "service screen" can tell visitors who answer a few questions what assistance they may qualify for.

Doyle said the site averages between 600 and 1,000 hits daily.

For providers, it's a simple, free way to get the word out about their services, Doyle said.

"It never costs the providers a penny," he said. "It only costs a little time." Providers can submit updated information 24 hours a day. But without the manpower to know about or contact every provider in the state, KyCARES staff can't be responsible for adding providers to the list. They have to log on with the proper information.

"We want every community provider — from the state to churches to clothing banks — to take the responsibility and say, 'Is my data on KyCARES?'"

And for Cabinet staff, KyCARES replaces old resource directories and business card files.

"It goes beyond what the Rolodex could do," Doyle said. "Staff can stop using sticky notes and numerous files, which can be unbelievably burdening." KyCARES eliminates the problem of staff keeping private lists of service providers that they don't want to share, Doyle said.

"The worst thing is keeping that information secluded," he said. "It doesn't help service organizations grow. When you never tell your coworkers about a service, what do they do with a person who has that need?"

Sharing information lets service providers know the true demand for their services, which helps them tap into appropriate funding, Doyle said.

Getting used to KyCARES might take some time, Doyle said. To encourage more participation, he's able to visit offices or groups, like county vision or CFS teams, and walk them through the site.

Doyle said the Web site has recently gotten attention from federal government staff, who wants to copy the KyCARES model on a national level.

Helping the federal government will inevitably help Kentucky, Doyle said. KyCARES could have a link to the national service provider network. And since the state owns the computer program that drives the site, Kentucky could derive a financial benefit from sharing its knowledge.

By leveraging their ability to serve customers, KyCARES can make Cabinet staff appear to be super-knowledgeable, when in fact they only have a super tool, Doyle said.

They should seize the advantage it gives them, he said. "You have a stake in this. Get rid of the Rolodex when KyCARES can do that for you."



From left are the winners of the Division of Family Support's "Kentucky Derby" for best horse: Joyce Kelly, place; Beth Hammermeister, win; Commissioner Dietra Paris, judge; and Paula Bach, show.



Family Support Celebrates Kentucky Derby

By Anya Armes Weber

The Division of Family Support held its annual Derby Festival this year, complete with fireworks, a balloon race and of course a contest for the best horse.

"Thunder Over Louisville" and "The Great Balloon Race" were colorfully illustrated on the office's walls.

After a buffet breakfast, the competitions began.

First was the race for the best-decorated paper horse.

Beth Hammermeister got the win with her patriotic, U.S. flag-waving horse, whose jockey had the face of her supervisor, Mark Milliner. Joyce Kelly's horse placed and Paula Bach's entry showed.

In the hat competition, Katie Brown won with her creation, embellished with flowers and Derby ticket stubs. Melissa Hayes' hat won second and Linda Fallis came in third. Mark Milliner got the honorary prize of "stable boy" for his hunting cap.

Commissioner Dietra Paris judged the fields in both competitions.

"For the horses, I was looking for originality and detail – the amount of work out into it," she said. "For she hats, the winners had the most 'Derby' motif."

Family Support staff have occasional monthly gatherings, like their Hispanic Valentine's Day and holiday celebrations, but none is as festive as the Derby party, said Ron Kelein, manager of the Operations Support Branch.

"It's a nice break from the routine," he said. "We get to see lots of people we don't usually work with get involved. It's good team building."

The Office of the General Counsel had their own lunchtime Derby party and hat competition. And the Office of the Ombudsman celebrated the Run for the Roses, too, with a potluck breakfast.



From left are the winners of the best hat contest: Linda Fallis, show; Mark Milliner, "stable boy"; Katie Brown, win; Dietra Paris, judge; and Melissa Hayes, place.



Here's a look at the field in Family Support's "Kentucky Derby."



Family Support's version of "Thunder Over Louisville"



Visitors to the third floor got a look at Family Support's "Great Balloon Race."



Sick Leave Needs

Janice Farler CFC/OTS is in need of donated sick leave. To donate leave time, contact Dona True at 573-7017 Ext.113.